

POEMS

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1916-1918

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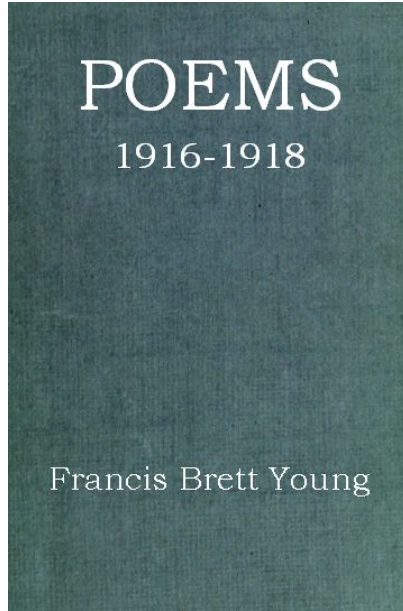
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POEMS
1916-1918

BY
FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG



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Novels:

THE YOUNG PHYSICIAN
THE CRESCENT MOON
THE IRON AGE
THE DARK TOWER

DEEP SEA
UNDERGROWTH (with E. Brett Young)

Poems:
FIVE DEGREES SOUTH

Belles Lettres:
ROBERT BRIDGES: A Critical Study
MARCHING ON TANGA

TO
EDYTH GOODALL

*Remember thus our sweet conspiracy:
That I, having dreamed a lovely thing, with dull
Words marred it—and you gave it back to me
A thousand, thousand times more beautiful.*

ERRATA

Page 26, line 17, *for* "Lybian" *read* "Libyan."
Page 46, line 9, *for* "lythe" *read* "lithe."
Page 70, line 13, *for* "tyrranous" *read* "tyrannous."

[Transcriber's note: the above errata have been applied to this etext. The word "Lybia" was also on page 32, and was corrected as above. Similarly, "tyrranous" was also on page 86, and was corrected.]

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PROTHALAMION

When the evening came my love said to me:
 Let us go into the garden now that the sky is cool,
The garden of black hellebore and rosemary,
 Where wild woodruff spills in a milky pool.

Low we passed in the twilight, for the wavering heat
 Of day had waned, and round that shaded plot
Of secret beauty the thickets clustered sweet:
 Here is heaven, our hearts whispered, but our lips spake not.

Between that old garden and seas of lazy foam
 Gloomy and beautiful alleys of trees arise
With spire of cypress and dreamy beechen dome,
 So dark that our enchanted sight knew nothing but the skies

Veiled with soft air, drench'd in the roses' musk
 Or the dusky, dark carnation's breath of clove;
No stars burned in their deeps, but through the dusk
 I saw my love's eyes, and they were brimmed with love.

No star their secret ravished, no wasting moon
 Mocked the sad transience of those eternal hours:
Only the soft, unseeing heaven of June,
 The ghosts of great trees, and the sleeping flowers.

For doves that crooned in the leafy noonday now
 Were silent; the night-jar sought his secret covers,
 Nor even a mild sea-whisper moved a creaking bough—
 Was ever a silence deeper made for lovers?

Was ever a moment meeter made for love?
 Beautiful are your closed lips beneath my kiss;
 And all your yielding sweetness beautiful—
 Oh, never in all the world was such a night as this!

TESTAMENT

If I had died, and never seen the dawn
 For which I hardly hoped, lighting this lawn
 Of silvery grasses; if there had been no light,
 And last night merged into perpetual night;
 I doubt if I should ever have been content
 To have closed my eyes without some testament
 To the great benefits that marked my faring
 Through the sweet world; for all my joy was sharing
 And lonely pleasures were few. Unto which end
 Three legacies I'll send,
 Three legacies, already half possess'd:
 One to a friend, of all good friends the best,
 Better than which is nothing; yet another
 Unto thy twin, dissimilar spirit, Brother;
 The third to you,
 Most beautiful, most true,
 Most perfect one, to whom they all are due.

Quick, quick ... while there is time...
 O best of friends, I leave you one sublime
 Summer, one fadeless summer. 'Twas begun
 Ere Cotswold hawthorn tarnished in the sun,
 When hedges were fledged with green, and early swallows

Swift-darting, on curved wings, pillaged the fallows;
 When all our vale was dappled blossom and light,
 And oh, the scent of beanfields in the night!
 You shall remember that rich dust at even
 Which made old Evesham like a street in heaven,
 Gold-paved, and washed within a wave of golden
 Air all her dreamy towers and gables olden.
 You shall remember
 How arms sun-blistered, hot palms crack'd with rowing,
 Clove the cool water of Avon, sweetly flowing;
 And how our bodies, beautifully white,
 Stretch'd to a long stroke lengthened in green light,
 And we, emerging, laughed in childish wise,
 And pressed the kissing water from our eyes.
 Ah, was our laughter childish, or were we wise?
 And then, crown of the day, a tired returning
 With happy sunsets over Bredon burning,
 With music and with moonlight, and good ale,
 And no thought for the morrow.... Heavy phlox
 Our garden pathways bordered, and evening stocks,
 Those humble weeds, in sunlight withered and pale,
 With a night scent to match the nightingale,
 Gladdened with spicèd sweetness sweet night's shadows,
 Meeting the breath of hay from mowing meadows:
 As humble was our joy, and as intense
 Our rapture. So, before I hurry hence,
 Yours be the memory.

One night again,
 When we were men, and had striven, and known pain,
 By a dark canal debating, unresigned,
 On the blind fate that shadows humankind,
 On the blind sword that severs human love...
 Then did the hidden belfry from above
 On troubled minds in benediction shed
 The patience of the great anonymous dead
 Who reared those towers, those high cathedrals buildèd
 In solemn stone, and with clear fancy gilded
 A beauty beyond ours, trusting in God.
 Then dared we follow the dark way they trod,
 And bowing to the universal plan

Trust in the true and fiery spirit of Man.

And you, my Brother,
You know, as knows one other,
How my spirit revisiteth a room
In a high wing, beneath pine-trees, where gloom
Dwelleth, dispelled by resinous wood embers,
Where, in half-darkness ... How the heart remembers...
We talked of beauty, and those fiery things
To which the divine desirous spirit clings,
In a wing'd rapture to that heaven flinging,
Where beauty is an easy thing, and singing
The natural speech of man. Like kissing swords
Our wits clashed there; the brittle beauty of words
Breaking, seemed to discover its secret heart
And all the rapt elusiveness of Art.
Now I have known sorrow, and now I sing
That a lovely word is not an idle thing;
For as with stars the cloth of night is spangled,
With star-like words, most lovelily entangled,
The woof of sombre thought is deckt.... Ah, bright
And cold they glitter in the spirit's night!
But neither distant nor dispassionate;
For beauty is an armour against fate....
I tell you, who have stood in the dark alone.
Seeing the face that turneth all to stone,
Medusa, blind with hate,
While I was dying, Beauty sate with me
Nor tortured any longer; gracious was she;
To her soft words I listened, and was content
To die, nor sorry that my light was spent.
So, Brother, if I come not home,
Go to that little room
That my spirit revisiteth, and there,
Somewhere in the blue air, you shall discover
If that you be a lover
Nor haughtily minded, all that once half-shaped
Then fled us, and escaped:
All that I found that day,
Far, so far away.

And you, my lovely one,
 What can I leave to you, who, you having left,
 Am utterly bereft?
 What in my store of visionary dowers
 Is not already yours?
 What silences, what hours
 Of peace passing all understanding; days
 Made lyric by your beauty and its praise;
 Years neither time can tarnish, nor death mar,
 Wherein you shined as steadfast as a star
 In my bleak night, heedless of the cloud-wrack
 Scudding in torn fleeces black
 Of my dark moods, as those who rule the far
 Star-haunted pleasaunces of heaven are?
 So think but lightly of that afternoon
 With white clouds climbing a blue sky in June
 When a boy worshipped under dreaming trees,
 Who touched your hand, and sought your eyes.
 ... Ah, cease,
 Not these, not these...
 Nor yet those nights when icy Brathay thundered
 Under his bridges, and ghostly mountains wondered
 At the white blossoming of a Christmas rose
 More stainless than their snows;
 Nor even of those placid days together
 Mellow as early autumn's amber weather
 When beech is ankleted with fire, and old
 Elms wear their livery of yellow gold,
 When orchards all are laden with increase,
 And the quiet earth hath fruited, and knows peace
 Oh, think not overmuch on those sweet years
 Lest their last fruit be tears, –
 Your tears, beloved, that were my utmost pain, –
 But rather, dream again
 How that a lover, half poet and half child,
 An eager spirit of fragile fancies wild
 Compact, adored the beauty and truth in you:
 To your own truth be true;
 And when, not mournfully, you turn this page
 Consider still your starry heritage,

Continue in your loveliness, a star
 To gladden me from afar
 Even where there is no light
 In my last night.

LOCHANILAUN

This is the image of my last content:
 My soul shall be a little lonely lake,
 So hidden that no shadow of man may break
 The folding of its mountain battlement;
 Only the beautiful and innocent
 Whiteness of sea-born cloud drooping to shake
 Cool rain upon the reed-beds, or the wake
 Of churn'd cloud in a howling wind's descent.
 For there shall be no terror in the night
 When stars that I have loved are born in me,
 And cloudy darkness I will hold most fair;
 But this shall be the end of my delight:
 That you, my lovely one, may stoop and see
 Your image in the mirrored beauty there.

LETTERMORE

These winter days on Lettermore
 The brown west wind it sweeps the bay,
 And icy rain beats on the bare
 Unhomely fields that perish there:
 The stony fields of Lettermore
 That drink the white Atlantic spray.

And men who starve on Lettermore,
 Cursing the haggard, hungry surf,
 Will souse the autumn's bruised grains
 To light dark fires within their brains
 And fight with stones on Lettermore
 Or sprawl beside the smoky turf.

When spring blows over Lettermore
 To bloom the ragged furze with gold,
 The lovely south wind's living breath
 Is laden with the smell of death:
 For fever breeds on Lettermore
 To waste the eyes of young and old.

A black van comes to Lettermore;
 The horses stumble on the stones,
 The drivers curse,—for it is hard
 To cross the hills from Oughterard
 And cart the sick from Lettermore:
 A stinking load of rags and bones.

But you will go to Lettermore
 When white sea-trout are on the run,
 When purple glows between the rocks
 About Lord Dudley's fishing-box
 Adown the road to Lettermore,
 And wide seas tarnish in the sun.

And so you'll think of Lettermore
 As a lost island of the blest:
 With peasant lovers in a blue
 Dim dusk, with heather drench'd in dew,
 And the sweet peace of Lettermore
 Remote and dreaming in the West.

LAMENT

Once, I think, a finer fire
Touched my lips, and then I sang
Half the songs of my desire:
With their splendour the world rang.

And their sweetness made me free
Of those starry ways whereby
Planets make their minstrelsy
In echoing, unending sky.

So, before that spell was broken,
Song of the wind, surge of the sea, –
Beautiful passionate things unspoken
Rose like a breaking wave in me:

Rose like a wave with curled crest
That green sunlight splinters through...
But the wave broke within my breast:
And now I am a man like you.

THE LEMON-TREE

Last night, last night, a vision of you
Sweetly troubled my waking dream:
Beneath the clear Algerian blue
You stood with lifted eyes: the beam
Of a winter sun beat on the crown
Of a lemon-tree, whose delicate fruit
Like pale lamps hung airily down;
And in your gazing eyes a mute
And lovely wonder... Have I sung
Of slender things and naught beside?
You were so beautifully young

I must have kissed you or have died.

PHTHONOS

If, in high jealousy, God made me blind
And laughed to see me stumble in the night,
Driving his many-splintered arrows of light
Into that lost dominion of my mind;
Then, knowing me still unvext and unresigned,
Stole from my ears all homely sounds that might
Temper the darkness, saying, in heaven's despite,
I had not wholly left the world behind;
So, sunless, soundless, if, to make an end,
He smote the nerves that move, the nerves that feel:
Even then, O jealous one, I would not complain
If I were spared the wealth I cannot spend,
If I were left the treasure none can steal:
The lovely words that wander through my brain.

EASTER

Adown our lane at Eastertide
Hosts of dancing bluebells lay

In pools of light: and 'Oh,' you cried,
 'Look, look at them: I think that they
 Are bluer than the laughing sea,
 And 'Look!' you cried, 'a piece of the sky
 Has fallen down for you and me
 To gaze upon and love.' ... And I,
 Seeing in your eyes the dancing blue
 And in your heart the innocent birth
 Of a pure delight, I knew, I knew
 That heaven had fallen upon earth.

THE LEANING ELM

Before my window, in days of winter hoar
 Huddled a mournful wood:
 Smooth pillars of beech, domed chestnut, sycamore,
 In stony sleep they stood:
 But you, unhappy elm, the angry west
 Had chosen from the rest,
 Flung broken on your brothers' branches bare,
 And left you leaning there
 So dead that when the breath of winter cast
 Wild snow upon the blast,
 The other living branches, downward bowed,
 Shook free their crystal shroud
 And shed upon your blackened trunk beneath,
 Their livery of death....

On windless nights between the beechen bars
 I watched cold stars
 Throb whitely in the sky, and dreamily
 Wondered if any life lay locked in thee:
 If still the hidden sap secretly moved,
 As water in the icy winterbourne
 Floweth unheard;

And half I pitied you your trance forlorn:
 You could not hear, I thought, the voice of any bird,
 The shadowy cries of bats in dim twilight
 Or cool voices of owls crying by night....
 Hunting by night under the hornèd moon:
 Yet half I envied you your wintry swoon,
 Till, on this morning mild, the sun, new-risen
 Steals from his misty prison;

The frozen fallows glow, the black trees shaken
 In a clear flood of sunlight vibrating awoken:
 And lo, your ravaged bole, beyond belief
 Slenderly fledged anew with tender leaf
 As pale as those twin vanes that break at last
 In a tiny fan above the black beech-mast
 Where no blade springeth green
 But pallid bells of the shy helleborine.
 What is this ecstasy that overwhelms
 The dreaming earth? See, the embrownèd elms
 Crowding purple distances warm the depths of the wood;
 A new-born wind tosses their tassels brown,
 His white clouds dapple the down;
 Into a green flame bursting the hedgerows stand;
 Soon, with banners flying, Spring will walk the land....

There is no day for thee, my soul, like this,
 No spring of lovely words. Nay, even the kiss
 Of mortal love that maketh man divine
 This light cannot outshine:
 Nay, even poets, they whose frail hands catch
 The shadow of vanishing beauty, may not match
 This leafy ecstasy. Sweet words may cull
 Such magical beauty as time may not destroy;
 But we, alas, are not more beautiful:
 We cannot flower in beauty as in joy.
 We sing, our musèd words are sped, and then
 Poets are only men
 Who age, and toil, and sicken.... This maim'd tree

May stand in leaf when I have ceased to be.

THE JOYOUS LOVER

O, now that I am free as the air
 And fleet as clouds above,
 I will wander everywhere
 Over the ways I love.

Lightly, lightly will I pass
 Nor scatter as I go
 A shadow on the blowing grass
 Or a footprint in the snow.

All the wild things of the wood
 That once were timid and shy
 They shall not flee their solitude
 For fear, when I pass by;

And beauty, beauty, the wide world over,
 Shall blush when I draw near:
 She knows her lover, the joyous lover,
 And greets him without fear.

But if I come to the dark room
 From which our love hath fled
 And bend above you in the gloom
 Or kneel beside your bed,

Smile soft in your sleep, my beautiful one,
 For if you should say 'Nay'
 To the dream which visiteth you alone,

My joy would wither away.

DEAD POETS

ODE WRITTEN AT WILTON HOUSE

Last night, amazed, I trod on holy ground
Breathing an air that ancient poets knew,
Where, in a valley compassed with sweet sound,
Beneath a garden's alley'd shades of yew,
With eager feet passèd that singer sweet
Who Stella loved, whom bloody Zutphen slew
In the starred zenith of his knightly fame.
There too a dark-stoled figure I did meet:
Herbert, whose faith burned true
And steadfast as the altar candle's flame.

Under the Wilton cedars, pondering
Upon the pains of Beauty and the wrong
That sealeth lovely lips, fated to sing,
Before they reach the cadence of their song,
I mused upon dead poets: mighty ones
Who sang and suffered: briefly heard were they
As Libyan nightingales weary of wing
Fleeing the temper of Saharan suns
To gladden our moon'd May,
And with the broken blossom vanishing.

So to my eyes a sorrowful vision came
Of one whose name was writ in water: bright
His cheeks and eyes burned with a hectic flame;
And one, alas! I saw whose passionate might

Was spent upon a fevered fen in Greece;
 One shade there was who, starving, choked with bread;
 One, a drown'd corpse, through stormy water slips;
 One in the numbing poppy-juice found peace;
 And one, a youth, lay dead
 With powdered arsenic upon his lips.

O bitter were the sorrow that could dull
 The sombre music of slow evening
 Here, where the old world is so beautiful
 That even lesser lips are moved to sing
 How the wide heron sails into the light
 Black as the cedarn shadows on the lawns
 Or stricken woodlands patient in decay,
 And river water murmurs through the night
 Until autumnal dawns
 Burn in the glass of Nadder's watery way.

Nay, these were they by whom the world was lost,
 To whom the world most richly gave: forlorn
 Beauty they worshipp'd, counting not the cost
 If of their torment beauty might be born;
 And life, the splendid flower of their delight,
 Loving too eagerly, they broke, and spill'd
 The perfume that the folded petals close
 Before its prime; yet their frail fingers white
 From that bruised bloom distill'd
 Uttermost attar of the living rose.

Wherefore, O shining ones, I will not mourn
 You, who have ravish'd beauty's secret ways
 Beneath death's impotent shadow, suffering scorn,
 Hatred, and desolation in her praise....
 Thus as I spoke their phantom faces smiled,
 As brooding night with heavy downward wing
 Fell upon Wilton's elegiac stone,
 On the dark woodlands and the waters wild
 And every living thing—

Leaving me there amazed and alone.

PORTON WATER

Through Porton village, under the bridge,
 A clear bourne floweth, with grasses trailing,
 Wherein are shadows of white clouds sailing,
 And elms that shelter under the ridge.

Through Porton village we passed one day,
 Marching the plain for mile on mile,
 And crossed the bridge in single file,
 Happily singing, and marched away

Over the bridge where the shallow races,
 Under a clear and frosty sky:
 And the winterbourne, as we marched by,
 Mirrored a thousand laughing faces.

O, do we trouble you, Porton river,
 We who laughing passed, and after
 Found a resting-place for laughter?
 Over here, where the poplars shiver

By stagnant waters, we lie rotten.
 On windless nights, in the lonely places,
 There, where the winter water races,
 O, Porton river, are we forgotten?

Through Porton village, under the bridge,
 The clear bourne floweth with grasses trailing,
 Wherein are shadows of light cloud sailing,
 And elms that shelter under the ridge.

The pale moon she comes and looks;

Over the lonely spire she climbs;
 For there she is lovelier many times
 Than in the little broken brooks.

AN OLD HOUSE

No one lives in the old house; long ago
 The voices of men and women left it lonely.
 They shuttered the sightless windows in a row,
 Imprisoning empty darkness—darkness only.

Beyond the garden-closes, with sudden thunder
 The lumbering troop-train passing clanks and jangles;
 And I, a stranger, peer with careless wonder
 Into the thickets of the garden tangles.

Yet, as I pass, a transient vision dawns
 Ghostly upon my pondering spirit's gloom,
 Of grey lavender bushes and weedy lawns
 And a solitary cherry-tree in bloom....

No one lives in the old house: year by year
 The plaster crumbles on the lonely walls:
 The apple falls in the lush grass; the pear,
 Pulpulent with ripeness, on the pathway falls.

Yet this the garden was, where, on spring nights
 Under the cherry-blossom, lovers plighted
 Have wondered at the moony billows white,
 Dreaming uncountable springs by love delighted;

Whose ears have heard the blackbird's jolly whistle,
 The shadowy cries of bats in twilight flitting
 Zigzag beneath the eaves; or, on the thistle,
 The twitter of autumn birds swinging and sitting;

Whose eyes, on winter evenings, slow returning
 Saw on the frosted paths pale lamplight fall
 Streaming, or, on the hearth, red embers burning,
 And shadows of children playing in the hall.

Where have they gone, lovers of another day?
 (No one lives in the old house; long ago
 They shuttered the sightless windows....) Where are they,
 Whose eyes delighted in this moony snow?

I cannot tell ... and little enough they care,
 Though April spray the cherry-boughs with light,
 And autumn pile her harvest unaware
 Under the walls that echoed their delight.

I cannot tell ... yet I am as those lovers;
 For me, who pass on my predestinate way,
 The prodigal blossom billows and recovers
 In ghostly gardens a hundred miles away.

Yet, in my heart, a melancholy rapture
 Tells me that eyes, which now an iron haste
 Hurries to iron days, may here recapture
 A vision of ancient loveliness gone to waste.

THE DHOWS

South of Guardafui with a dark tide flowing
 We hailed two ships with tattered canvas bent to the monsoon,
 Hung betwixt the outer sea and pale surf showing
 Where dead cities of Libya lay bleaching in the moon.

'Oh whither be ye sailing with torn sails broken?'
 'We sail, we sail for Sheba, at Suliman's behest,
 With carven silver phalli for the ebony maids of Ophir

From brown-skinned baharias of Arabia the Blest.'

'Oh whither be ye sailing, with your dark flag flying?'
 'We sail, with creaking cedar, towards the Northern Star.
 The helmsman singeth wearily, and in our hold are lying
 A hundred slaves in shackles from the marts of Zanzibar.'

'Oh whither be ye sailing...?'

'Alas, we sail no longer:
 Our hulls are wrack, our sails are dust, as any man might know.
 And why should you torment us? ... Your iron keels are stronger
 Than ghostly ships that sailed from Tyre a thousand years ago.'

THE GIFT

Marching on Tanga, marching the parch'd plain
 Of wavering spear-grass past Pangani River,
 England came to me—me who had always ta'en
 But never given before—England, the giver,
 In a vision of three poplar-trees that shiver
 On still evenings of summer, after rain,
 By Slapton Ley, where reed-beds start and quiver
 When scarce a ripple moves the upland grain.
 Then I thanked God that now I had suffered pain,
 And, as the parch'd plain, thirst, and lain awake
 Shivering all night through till cold daybreak:
 In that I count these sufferings my gain
 And her acknowledgment. Nay, more, would fain
 Suffer as many more for her sweet sake.

FIVE DEGREES SOUTH

I love all waves and lovely water in motion,
 That wavering iris in comb of the blown spray:
 Iris of tumbled nautilus in the wake's commotion,
 Their spread sails dipped in a marmoreal way
 Unquarried, wherein are greeny bubbles blowing
 Plumes of faint spray, cool in the deep
 And lucent seas, that pause not in their flowing
 To lap the southern starlight while they sleep.
 These I have seen, these I have loved and known:
 I have seen Jupiter, that great star, swinging
 Like a ship's lantern, silent and alone
 Within his sea of sky, and heard the singing
 Of the south trade, that siren of the air,
 Who shivers the taut shrouds, and singeth there.

104° FAHRENHEIT

To-night I lay with fever in my veins
 Consumed, tormented creature of fire and ice,
 And, weaving the enhavock'd brain's device,
 Dreamed that for evermore I must walk these plains
 Where sunlight slayeth life, and where no rains
 Abated the fierce air, nor slaked its fire:
 So that death seemed the end of all desire,
 To ease the distracted body of its pains.
 And so I died, and from my eyes the glare
 Faded, nor had I further need of breath;
 But when I reached my hand to find you there
 Beside me, I found nothing.... Lonely was death.
 And with a cry I wakened, but to hear

Thin wings of fever singing in my ear.

FEVER-TREES

The beautiful Acacia
 She sighs in desert lands:
 Over the burning waterways
 Of Africa she sways and sways,
 Even where no air glideth
 In cooling green she stands.

The beautiful Acacia
 She hath a yellow dress:
 A slender trunk of lemon sheen
 Gleameth through the tender green
 (Where the thorn hideth)
 Shielding her loveliness.

The beautiful Acacia
 Dwelleth in deadly lands:
 Over the brooding waterways
 Where death breedeth, she sways and sways,
 And no man long abideth
 In valleys where she stands.

THE RAIN-BIRD

High on the tufted baobab-tree
 To-night a rain-bird sang to me
 A simple song, of three notes only,
 That made the wilderness more lonely;

For in my brain it echoed nearly,
 Old village church bells chiming clearly:
 The sweet cracked bells, just out of tune,
 Over the mowing grass in June—

Over the mowing grass, and meadows
 Where the low sun casts long shadows.
 And cuckoos call in the twilight
 From elm to elm, in level flight.

Now through the evening meadows move
 Slow couples of young folk in love,
 Who pause at every crooked stile
 And kiss in the hawthorn's shade the while:

Like pale moths the summer frocks
 Hover between the beds of phlox,
 And old men, feeling it is late,
 Cease their gossip at the gate,

Till deeper still the twilight grows,
 And night blossometh, like a rose
 Full of love and sweet perfume,
 Whose heart most tender stars illumine.

Here the red sun sank like lead,
 And the sky blackened overhead;
 Only the locust chirped at me
 From the shadowy baobab-tree.

MOTHS

When I lay wakeful yesternight
 My fever's flame was a clear light,
 A taper, flaring in the wind,

Whither, fluttering out of the dim
 Night, many dreams glimmered by.
 Like moths, out of the darkness, blind,
 Hurling at that taper's flame,
 From drinking honey of the night's flowers
 Into my circled light they came:
 So near I could see their soft colours,
 Grey of the dove, most soothely grey;
 But my heat singed their wings, and away
 Darting into the dark again,
 They escaped me....

Others floated down
 Like those vaned seeds that fall
 In autumn from the sycamore's crown
 When no leaf trembleth nor branch is stirred,
 More silent in flight than any bird,
 Or bat's wings flitting in darkness, soft
 As lizards moving on a white wall
 They came quietly from aloft
 Down through my circle of light, and so
 Into unlighted gloom below.
 But one dream, strong-winged, daring
 Flew beating at the heart of the flame
 Till I feared it would have put out my light,
 My thin taper, fitfully flaring,
 And that I should be left alone in the night
 With no more dreams for my delight.

Can it be that from the dead
 Even their dreams, their dreams are fled?

BÊTE HUMAINE

Riding through Ruwu swamp, about sunrise,
 I saw the world awake; and as the ray

Touched the tall grasses where they dream till day,
 Lo, the bright air alive with dragonflies,
 With brittle wings aquiver, and great eyes
 Piloting crimson bodies, slender and gay.
 I aimed at one, and struck it, and it lay
 Broken and lifeless, with fast-fading dyes...
 Then my soul sickened with a sudden pain
 And horror, at my own careless cruelty,
 That where all things are cruel I had slain
 A creature whose sweet life it is to fly:
 Like beasts that prey with bloody claw...
 Nay, they
 Must slay to live, but what excuse had I?

DOVES

On the edge of the wild-wood
 Grey doves fluttering:
 Grey doves of Astarte
 To the woods at daybreak
 Lazily uttering
 Their murmured enchantment,
 Old as man's childhood;

While she, pale divinity
 Of hidden evil,
 Silvers the regions chaste
 Of cold sky, and broodeth
 Over forests primeval
 And all that thorny waste's
 Wooded infinity.

'Lovely goddess of groves,'
 Cried I, 'what enchanted
 Sinister recesses

Of these lone shades
 May still be haunted
 By thy demon caresses,
 Thy unholy loves?’

But clear day quelleth
 Her dominion lonely,
 And the soft ring-dove,
 Murmuring, telleth
 That dark sin only
 From man’s lust springeth,
 In man’s heart dwelleth.

SONG

I made a song in my love’s likeness
 From colours of my quietude,
 From trees whose blossoms shine no less
 Than butterflies in the wild-wood.

I laid claim on all beauty
 Under the sun to praise her wonder,
 Till the noise of war swept over me,
 Stopp’d my singing mouth with thunder.

The angel of death hath swift wings,
 I heard him strip the huddled trees
 Overhead, as a hornet sings,
 And whip the grass about my knees.

Down we crouched in the parchèd dust,
 Down beneath that deadly rain:
 Dead still I lay, as lie one must
 Who hath a bullet in his brain.

Dead they left me: but my soul, waking,
 Quietly laughed at their distress
 Who guessed not that I still was making
 That new song in my love's likeness.

BEFORE ACTION

Now the wind of the dawn sighs,
 Now red embers have burned white,
 Under the darkness faints and dies
 The slow-beating heart of night.

Into the darkness my eyes peer
 Seeing only faces steel'd,
 And level eyes that know not fear;
 Yet each heart is a battlefield

Where phantom armies foin and feint
 And bloody victories are won
 From the time when stars are faint
 To the rising of the sun.

With banners broken, and the roll
 Of drums, at dawn the phantoms fly:
 A man must commune with his soul
 When he marches out to die.

O day of wrath and of desire!
 For each may know upon this day
 Whether he be a thing of fire
 Or fettered to the traitor clay.

Such is the hazard that is thrown:
 We know not how the dice may fall:
 All the secrets shall be known

Or else we shall not know at all.

ON A SUBALTERN KILLED IN ACTION

Into that dry and most desolate place
 With heavy gait they dragged the stretcher in
 And laid him on the bloody ground: the din
 Of Maxim fire ceased not. I raised his head,
 And looked into his face,
 And saw that he was dead.
 Saw beneath matted curls the broken skin
 That let the bullet in;
 And saw the limp, lithe limbs, the smiling mouth...
 (Ah, may we smile at death
 As bravely....) the curv'd lips that no more drouth
 Should blacken, and no sweetly stirring breath
 Mildly displace.
 So I covered the calm face
 And stripped the shirt from his firm breast, and there,
 A zinc identity disc, a bracelet of elephant hair
 I found.... Ah, God, how deep it stings
 This unendurable pity of small things!

But more than this I saw,
 That dead stranger welcoming, more than the raw
 And brutal havoc of war.
 England I saw, the mother from whose side
 He came hither and died, she at whose hems he had play'd,
 In whose quiet womb his body and soul were made.
 That pale, estrangèd flesh that we bowed over
 Had breathed the scent in summer of white clover;
 Dreamed her cool fading nights, her twilights long,
 And days as careless as a blackbird's song
 Heard in the hush of eve, when midges' wings
 Make a thin music, and the night-jar spins.

(For it is summer, I thought, in England now....)
 And once those forward gazing eyes had seen
 Her lovely living green: that blackened brow
 Cool airs, from those blue hills moving, had fann'd-
 Breath of that holy land
 Whither my soul aspireth without despair:
 In the broken brain had many a lovely word
 Awakened magical echoes of things heard,
 Telling of love and laughter and low voices,
 And tales in which the English heart rejoices
 In vanishing visions of childhood and its glories:
 Old-fashioned nursery rhymes and fairy stories:
 Words that only an English tongue could tell.

And the firing died away; and the night fell
 On our battle. Only in the sullen sky
 A prairie fire, with huge fantastic flame
 Leapt, lighting dark clouds charged with thunder.
 And my heart was sick with shame
 That there, in death, he should lie,
 Crying: 'Oh, why am I alive, I wonder?'

In a dream I saw war riding the land:
 Stark rode she, with bowed eyes, against the glare
 Of sack'd cities smouldering in the dark,
 A tired horse, lean, with outreaching head,
 And hid her face of dread....
 Yet, in my passion would I look on her,
 Crying, O hark,
 Thou pale one, whom now men say bearest the scythe
 Of God, that iron scythe forged by his thunder
 For reaping of nations overripened, fashioned
 Upon the clanging anvil whose sparks, flying
 In a starry night, dying, fall hereunder....
 But she, she heeded not my cry impassioned
 Nor turned her face of dread,
 Urging the tired horse, with outreaching head,
 O thou, cried I, who choosest for thy going
 These bloomy meadows of youth, these flowery ways
 Whereby no influence strays

Ruder than a cold wind blowing,
 Or beating needles of rain,
 Why must thou ride again
 Ruthless among the pastures yet unripened,
 Crushing their beauty in thine iron track
 Downtrodden, ravish'd in thy following flame,
 Parched and black?
 But she, she stayed not in her weary haste
 Nor turned her face; but fled:
 And where she passed the lands lay waste....

And now I cannot tell whither she rideth:
 But tired, tired rides she.
 Yet know I well why her dread face she hideth:
 She is pale and faint to death. Yea, her day faileth,
 Nor all her blood, nor all her frenzy burning,
 Nor all her hate availeth:
 For she passeth out of sight
 Into that night
 From which none, none returneth
 To waste the meadows of youth,
 Nor vex thine eyelids, Routh,
 O sorrowful sister, soother of our sorrow.
 And a hope within me springs
 That fair will be the morrow,
 And that charred plain,
 Those flowery meadows, shall rejoice at last
 In a sweet, clean
 Freshness, as when the green
 Grass springeth, where the prairie fire hath passed.

AFTER ACTION

All through that day of battle the broken sound
 Of shattering Maxim fire made mad the wood;

So that the low trees shuddered where they stood,
 And echoes bellowed in the bush around:
 But when, at last the light of day was drowned,
 That madness ceased.... Ah, God, but it was good!
 There, in the reek of iodine and blood,
 I flung me down upon the thorny ground.
 So quiet was it, I might well have been lying
 In a room I love, where the ivy cluster shakes
 Its dew upon the lattice panes at even:
 Where rusty ivory scatters from the dying
 Jessamine blossom, and the musk-rose breaks
 Her dusky bloom beneath a summer heaven.

SONNET

Not only for remembered loveliness,
 England, my mother, my own, we hold thee rare
 Who toil, and fight, and sicken beneath the glare
 Of brazen skies that smile on our duress,
 Making us crave thy cloudy state no less
 Than the sweet clarity of thy rain-wash'd air,
 Meadows in moonlight cool, and every fair
 Slow-fading flower of thy summer dress:
 Not for thy flowers, but for the unfading crown
 Of sacrifice our happy brothers wove thee:
 The joyous ones who laid thy beauty down
 Nor stayed to see it shamed. For these we love thee,
 For this (O love, O dread!) we hold thee more
 Divinely fair to-day than heretofore.

A FAREWELL TO AFRICA

„ vspace:: 2

Now once again, upon the pole-star's bearing,
 We plough these furrowed fields where no blade springeth;
 Again the busy trade in the halyards singeth
 Sun-whitened spindrift from the blown wave shearing;
 The uncomplaining sea suffers our faring;
 In a brazen glitter our little wake is lost,
 And the starry south rolls over until no ghost
 Remaineth of us and all our pitiful daring;
 For the sea beareth no trace of man's endeavour,
 His might enarmoured, his prosperous argosies,
 Soundless, within her unsounded caves, forever
 She broodeth, knowing neither war nor peace,
 And our grey cruisers holds in mind no more
 Than the cedarn fleets that Sheba's treasure bore.

SONG

What is the worth of war
 In a world that turneth, turneth
 About a tired star
 Whose flaming centre burneth
 No longer than the space
 Of the spent atom's race:
 Where conquered lands, soon, soon
 Lie waste as the pale moon?

What is the worth of art
 In a world that fast forgetteth
 Those who have wrung its heart
 With beauty that love begetteth,
 Whose faint flames vanish quite
 In that star-powdered night
 Where even the mighty ones
 Shine only as far suns?

And what is beauty worth,
Sweet beauty, that persuadeth
Of her immortal birth,
Then, as a flower, fadeth:
Or love, whose tender years
End with the mourner's tears,
Die, when the mourner's breath
Is quiet, at last, in death?

Beauty and love are one,
Even when fierce war clashes:
Even when our fiery sun
Hath burnt itself to ashes,
And the dead planets race
Unlighted through blind space,
Beauty will still shine there:
Wherefore, I worship her.

THE HAWTHORN SPRAY

I saw a thrush light on a hawthorn spray,
One moment only, spilling creamy blossom,
While the bough bent beneath her speckled bosom,
Bent, and recovered, and she fluttered away.

The branch was still; but, in my heart, a pain
Than the thorn'd spray more cruel, stabbed me, only
Remembering days in a far land and lonely
When I had never hoped for summer again.

THE PAVEMENT

In bitter London's heart of stone,
 Under the lamplight's shielded glare.
 I saw a soldier's body thrown
 Unto the drabs that traffic there

Pacing the pavements with slow feet:
 Those old pavements whose blown dust
 Throttles the hot air of the street,
 And the darkness smells of lust.

The chaste moon, with equal glance,
 Looked down on the mad world, astare
 At those who conquered in sad France
 And those who perished in Leicester Square.

And in her light his lips were pale:
 Lips that love had moulded well:
 Out of the jaws of Passchendaele
 They had sent him to this nether hell.

I had no stone of scorn to fling,
 For I know not how the wrong began—
 But I had seen a hateful thing
 Masked in the dignity of man:

And hate and sorrow and hopeless anger
 Swept my heart, as the winds that sweep
 Angrily through the leafless hanger
 When winter rises from the deep....

* * * * *

I would that war were what men dream:
 A crackling fire, a cleansing flame,
 That it might leap the space between

And lap up London and its shame.

To LYDIA LOPOKOVA

HER GARLAND

O thou who comest to our wintry shade
Gay and light-footed as the virgin Spring,
Before whose shining feet the cherries fling
Their moony tribute, when the sloe is sprayed
With light, and all things musical are made:
O thou who art Spring's daughter, who can bring
Blossom, or song of bird, or anything
To match the youth in which you stand arrayed?
Not that rich garland Meleager twined
In his sun-guarded glade above the blue
That flashes from the burning Tyrian seas:
No, you are cooler, sweeter than the wind
That wakes our woodlands; so I bring to you
These wind-blown blossoms of anemones.

HER VARIETY

Soft as a pale moth flitting in moonshine
I saw thee flutter to the shadowy call
That beckons from the strings of Carneval,
O frail and fragrant image of Columbine:
So, when the spectre of the rose was thine,
A flower wert thou, and last I saw thee fall
In Cleopatra's stormy bacchanal
Flown with the red insurgence of the vine.

O moth, O flower, O mænad, which art thou?
 Shadowy, beautiful, or leaping wild
 As stormlight over savage Tartar skies?
 Such were my ancient questionings; but now
 I know that you are nothing but a child
 With a red flower's mouth and hazel eyes.

HER SWIFTNESS

You are too swift for poetry, too fleet
 For any musèd numbers to ensnare:
 Swifter than music dying on the air
 Or bloom upon rose-petals, fades the sweet
 Vanishing magic of your flying feet,
 Your poisèd finger, and your shining hair:
 Words cannot tell how wonderful you were,
 Or how one gesture made a joy complete.
 And since you know my pen may never capture
 The transient swift loveliness of you,
 Come, let us salve our sense of the world's loss
 Remembering, with a melancholy rapture,
 How many dancing-girls ... and poets too...
 Dream in the dust of Hecatompulos.

GHOSTLY LOVES

'Oh why,' my darling prayeth me, 'must you sing
 For ever of ghostly loves, phantasmal passion?
 Seeing that you never loved me after that fashion
 And the love I gave was not a phantom thing,
 But delight of eager lips and strong arms folding
 The beauty of yielding arms and of smooth shoulder,

All fluent grace of which you were the moulder:
 And I... Oh, I was happy for your holding.'
 'Ah, do you not know, my dearest, have you not seen
 The shadow that broodeth over things that perish:
 How age may mock sweet moments that have been
 And death defile the beauty that we cherish?
 Wherefore, sweet spirit, I thank thee for thy giving:
 'Tis my spirit that embraceth thee dead or living.'

FEBRUARY

The robin on my lawn,
 He was the first to tell
 How, in the frozen dawn,
 This miracle befell,
 Waking the meadows white
 With hoar, the iron road
 Agleam with splintered light,
 And ice where water flowed:
 Till, when the low sun drank
 Those milky mists that cloak
 Hanger and hollied bank,
 The winter world awoke
 To hear the feeble bleat
 Of lambs on downland farms:
 A blackbird whistled sweet;
 Old beeches moved their arms
 Into a mellow haze
 Aerial, newly-born:
 And I, alone, agaze,
 Stood waiting for the thorn
 To break in blossom white
 Or burst in a green flame...
 So, in a single night,
 Fair February came,

Bidding my lips to sing
 Or whisper their surprise,
 With all the joy of spring
 And morning in her eyes.

SONG OF THE DARK AGES

We digged our trenches on the down
 Beside old barrows, and the wet
 White chalk we shovelled from below;
 It lay like drifts of thawing snow
 On parados and parapet:

Until a pick neither struck flint
 Nor split the yielding chalky soil,
 But only calcined human bone:
 Poor relic of that Age of Stone
 Whose ossuary was our spoil.

Home we marched singing in the rain,
 And all the while, beneath our song,
 I mused how many springs should wane
 And still our trenches scar the plain:
 The monument of an old wrong.

But then, I thought, the fair green sod
 Will wholly cover that white stain,
 And soften, as it clothes the face
 Of those old barrows, every trace
 Of violence to the patient plain.

And careless people, passing by,
 Will speak of both in casual tone:
 Saying: 'You see the toil they made:
 The age of iron, pick, and spade,

Here jostles with the Age of Stone.'

Yet either from that happier race
 Will merit but a passing glance;
 And they will leave us both alone:
 Poor savages who wrought in stone—
 Poor savages who fought in France.

WINTER SUNSET

Athwart the blackening bars of pines benighted,
 The sun, descending to the zones of denser
 Cloud that o'erhung the long horizon, lighted
 Upon the crown of earth a flaming censer
 From which white clouds of incense, overflowing,
 Filled the chill clarity from whence the swallows
 Had lately fled with wreathed vapours, showing
 Like a fine bloom over the lonely fallows:
 Where, with the pungent breath of mist was blended
 A faint aroma of pine-needles sodden
 By autumn rains, and fainter still, ascended
 Beneath high woods the scent of leaves duntrodden.
 It was a moment when the earth, that sickened
 For Spring, as lover when the beloved lingers,
 Lay breathless, while the distant goddess quickened
 Some southern hill-side with her glowing fingers:
 And so, it seemed, the drowsy lands were shaken,
 Stirred in their sleep, and sighed, as though the pain
 Of a strange dream had bidden them awaken
 To frozen days and bitter nights again.

SONG

Why have you stolen my delight
 In all the golden shows of Spring
 When every cherry-tree is white
 And in the limes the thrushes sing,

O fickler than the April day,
 O brighter than the golden broom,
 O blyther than the thrushes' lay,
 O whiter than the cherry-bloom,

O sweeter than all things that blow ...
 Why have you only left for me
 The broom, the cherry's crown of snow,
 And thrushes in the linden-tree?

ENGLAND—APRIL, 1918

Last night the North flew at the throat of Spring
 With spite to tear her greening banners down,
 Tossing the elm-tree's tender tassels brown,
 The virgin blossom of sloe burdening
 With colder snow; beneath his frosty sting
 Patient, the newly-wakened woods were bowed
 By drownèd fields where stormy waters flowed:
 Yet, on the thorn, I heard a blackbird sing...
 'Too late, too late,' he sang, 'this wintry spite;
 For molten snow will feed the springing grass:
 The tide of life, it floweth with the year.'
 O England, England, thou that standest upright
 Against the tide of death, the bad days pass:

Know, by this miracle, that summer is near.

SLENDER THEMES

When, by a happier race, these leaves are turned,
They'll wonder that such quiet themes engaged
A soldier's mind when noisy wars were waged,
And half the world in one red bonfire burned.
'When that fierce age,' they'll say, 'went up in flame
He lived ... or died, seeing those bright deeds done
Whereby our sweet and settled peace was won,
Yet offereth slender dreams, not deeds, to Fame.'
Then say: 'Out of the heart the mouth speaketh,
And mine was as the hearts of other men
Whom those dark days impassioned; yet it seeketh
To paint the sombre woes that held us then,
No more than the cloud-rending levin's light
Seeks to illumine the sad skies of night.'

INVOCATION

Whither, O, my sweet mistress, must I follow thee?
For when I hear thy distant footfall nearing,
And wait on thy appearing,
Lo! my lips are silent: no words come to me.

Once I waylaid thee in green forest covers,
Hoping that spring might free my lips with gentle fingers;
Alas! her presence lingers
No longer than on the plain the shadow of brown kestrel hovers.

Through windless ways of the night my spirit followed after;—
 Cold and remote were they, and there, possessed
 By a strange unworldly rest,
 Awaiting thy still voice heard only starry laughter.

The pillared halls of sleep echoed my ghostly tread.
 Yet when their secret chambers I essayed
 My spirit sank, dismayed,
 Waking in fear to find the new-born vision fled.

Once indeed—but then my spirit bloomed in leafy rapture—
 I loved; and once I looked death in the eyes:
 So, suddenly made wise,
 Spoke of such beauty as I may never recapture....

Whither, O, divine mistress, must I then follow thee?
 Is it only in love ... say, is it only in death
 That the spirit blossometh,
 And words that may match my vision shall come to me?

THAMAR

(*To Thamar Karsavina*)

Once in the sombre light of the throng'd courts of night,
 In a dream-haunted land only inhabited
 By the unhappy dead, came one who, anxious eyed,
 Clung to my idle hand with clenched fingers weak
 And gazed into my eyes as he had wrongs to speak.
 Silent he stood and wan, more pallid than the leaves
 Of an aspen blown under a wind that grieves.
 Then I: 'O haggard one, say from what ghostly zone
 Of thwarted destinies or torment hast thou come?
 Tell me thy race and name!' And he, with veiled face:
 'I have neither name nor race, but I have travelled far,

A timeless avatar of never-ending dooms,
 Out of those tyrannous glooms where, like a tired star
 In stormy darkness, looms the castle of Thamar...
 Once in a lonely dawn my eager spirit fared
 By ways that no men dared unto a desert land,
 Where, on a sullen strand, a mouldering city, vast
 As towered Babylon, stood in the dreamy sand—
 Older a million years: Babel was builded on
 That broken city's tears; dust of her crumbled past
 Rose from the rapid wheels of Babel's charioteers
 In whorled clouds above those shining thoroughfares
 Where Babel's millions tread on her unheeding dead.
 Forth from an eastern gate where the lips of Asia wait
 Parch'd with an ancient thirst that no æons can abate,
 Passed I, predestinate, to a thorn'd desert's drought,
 Where the rivers of the south, flowing in a cloudy spate,
 Spend at last their splendid strength in a sea of molten glass
 Seething with the brazen might of a white sun dipped at length
 Like a baked stone, burning hot, plunged in a hissing pot.
 Out of that solemn portal over the tawny waste,
 Without stay, without haste, nor the joy of any mortal
 Glance of eye or clasp of hand, desolate, in a burning land,
 Lonely days and nights I travelled and the changing seasons squandered
 Friendless, endlessly, I wandered nor my woven fate unravelled;
 Drawn to a hidden goal, sore, forlorn with waiting,
 Seeking I knew not what, yet unhesitating
 Struggled my hapless soul...

There, in a thousand springs,
 Slow, beneath frozen snow, where the blind earth lay cringing,
 Have I seen the steppe unfold uncounted blossomings,
 Where salty pools shone fair in a quivering blue air
 That shivered every fringing reed-bed with cool delight,
 And fanned the mazy flight of slow-wing'd egrets white
 Beating and wheeling bright against the sun astare;
 But I could not hear their wings for they were ghostly things
 Sent by the powers of night to mock my sufferings
 And rain upon the bitter waterpools their drops aglitter.
 Yet, when these lakes accursed tortured my aching thirst,
 The green reeds fell to dust, the cool pools to a crust
 Of frozen salt crystallised to taunt my broken lips,

To cheat my staring eyes, as a vision of great ships
 With moving towers of sail, poops throng'd with grinning crowds
 And a wind in their shrouds, bears down upon the pale
 Wasted castaway afloat with the salt in his throat
 And a feeble wild desire to be quenched of his fire
 In the green gloom beneath.

So, again and again,

Hath a phantom city thrust to the visionary vault
 Of inviolate cobalt, dome and dreaming minaret
 Mosque and gleaming water-tower hazy in a fountain's jet
 Or a market's rising dust; and my lips have cried aloud
 To see them tremble there, though I knew within my heart
 They were chiselled out of cloud or carven of thin air;
 And my fingers clenched my hand, for I wondered if this land
 Of my stony pilgrimage were a glimmering mirage,
 And I myself no more than a phantom of the sand.

'But beyond these fading slender cities, many leagues away,
 Strange brooding mountains lay heaped, crowding range on range
 In a changing cloudy splendour; and beyond, in lakes of light,
 As eastward still I staggered, there swam into my sight,
 More vast and hoar and haggard, shoulders of ice and snow
 Bounding the heavens low of burnished brass, whereunder
 The hot plains of Cathay perpetually slumber:
 Where tawny millions breed in cities without number,
 Whither, a hill-born thunder, rolling on Tartary
 With torrents and barb'd lightning, swelleth the yellow river
 To a tumult of whitening foam and confused might
 That drowns in a single night many a mud-made city;
 And cities of boats, and frail cities of lath and reed,
 Are whirled away without pity or set afloat in a pale,
 Swirling, shallow sea ... and their names seem lost for ever
 Till a stranger nomad race drive their herds to the sad place
 Where old sorrows lie forgotten, and raise upon the rotten
 Level waste another brood to await another flood.

'But I never might attain to this melancholy plain
 For the mountains rose between; stark in my path they lay
 Between me and Cathay, through moving mist half-seen.
 And I knew that they were real, for their drooping folds of cloud
 Enwrapped me in a shroud, and the air that fell at night
 From their frozen summits white slid like an ice-blue steel

Into my living breast and stilled the heart within
 As the chill of an old sin that robs a man of rest,
 Killing all delight in the silence of the night
 And brooding black above till the heart dare not move
 But lieth cold and numb ... and the dawn will not come.

'Yet to me a dawn came, new-kindled in cold flame,
 Flinging the imminence of those inviolate snows
 On the forest lawns below in a shadow more immense
 Than their eternal vastness; and a new hope beyond reason,
 Flamed in my heart's dark season, dazzled my pallid eyes,
 Till, when the hot sun soared above the uttermost height,
 A draught of keen delight into my body was poured,
 For all that frozen fastness lay flowered with the spring:
 Her starry blossoms broke beneath my bruised feet,
 And their beauty was so sweet to me I kissed them where they lay;
 Yea, I bent my weary hips and kissed them with dry lips,
 Tenderly, only dreading lest their petals delicate
 Should be broken by my treading, for I lived, I lived again,
 And my heart would have been broken by a living creature's pain,
 So I kissed them for a token of my joy in their new birth,
 And I kissed the gentle earth. Slowly the shadows crept
 To the bases of the crags, and I slept....

'Once, in another life, had I remembered sleep,
 When tired children creep on to their mother's knees,
 And there a dreamless peace more quietly descendeth
 Than gentle evening endeth or ring-doves fold their wings,
 Before the nightjar spins or the nightingale begins;
 When the brooding hedgerow trees where they nest lie awake
 And breathe so soft they shake not a single shuddering leaf
 Lest the silence should break.

'Other sleep have I known,
 Deeper, beyond belief, when straining limbs relax
 After hot human toil in yellow harvest fields
 Where the panting earth yields a smell of baked soil,
 And the dust of dry stubbles blows over the whitening
 Shocks of lank grain and bundles of flax,
 And men fling themselves down forgetting their troubles,
 Unheeding of the song that the landrail weaves along
 Misty woodlands, or lightning that the pale sky laves
 Like phosphorescent waves washing summer seas:

And, more beautiful than these, that sleep of dazed wonder
 When love has torn asunder the veils of the sky
 And raptured lovers lie faint in each other's arms
 Beneath a heaven strewn with myriad starry swarms,
 Where planets float like lonely gold-flowered nenuphars
 In pools of the sky; yet, when they wake, they turn
 From those burning galaxies seeking heaven only
 In each other's eyes, and sigh, and sleep again;
 For while they sleep they seem to forget the world's pain,
 And when they wake, they dream....

'But other sleep was mine

As I had drunk of wine with bitter hemlock steep'd,
 Or soused with the heap'd milky poppyheads
 A drowsy Tartar treads where slow waters sweep
 Over red river beds, and the air is heavy with sleep.
 So, when I woke at last, the labouring earth had rolled
 Eastward under the vast dominion of night,
 Funereal, forlorn as that unlighted chamber
 Wherein she first was born, bereft of all starlight,
 Pale silver of the moon, or the low sun's amber.

'Then to my queen I prayed, grave Ashtoreth, whose shade
 Hallows the dim abyss of Heliopolis,
 Where many an olive maid clashed kissing Syrian cymbals,
 And silver-sounding timbrels shivered through the vale.
 O lovely, and O white, under the holy night
 Is their gleaming wonder, and their brows are pale
 As the new risen moon, dancing till they swoon
 In far forests under desolate Lebanon,
 While the flame of Moloch's pyre reddens the sea-born cloud
 That overshadows Tyre; so, when I cried aloud,
 Behold, a torch of fire leapt on the mountain-side!

'O bright, O beautiful! for never kindlier light
 Fell on the darkened sight of mortal eyes and dull
 Since that devoted one, whom gloomy Caucasus
 In icy silence lonely bound to his cruel shoulders,
 Brought to benighted men in a hollow fennel-stem
 Sparks of the torrid vapour that burned behind the bars
 Of evening, broke dawn's rose, or smouldered in the stars,
 Or lit the glowworm's taper, or wavered over the fen,
 Or tipped the javelin of the far-ravening levin,

Lash of the Lord of Heaven and bitter scourge of sin.
 O beautiful, O bright! my tired sinews strained
 To this torch that flared and waned as a watery planet gloweth
 And waneth in the night when a calm sea floweth
 Under a misty sky spread with the tattered veils
 Of rapid cloud driven over the deeps of heaven
 By winds that range too high to sweep the languid sails.
 On through the frozen night, like a blind moth flying
 With battered wing and bruised bloom into a light,
 I dragged my ragged limbs, cared not if I were dying,
 Knew not if I were dead, where cavernous crevasses,
 And stony desperate passes snared, waylaid my tread:
 In the roar of broken boulders split from rocky shoulders,
 In the thunder of snow sliding, or under the appalling
 Rending of glacier ice or hoarse cataracts falling:
 And I knew not what could save me but the unholy guiding
 That some demon gave me. Thrice I fell, and thrice
 In torrents of blue ice-water slipp'd and was toss'd
 Like a dead leaf, or a ghost
 Harried by thin bufferings of wind
 Downward to Tartarus at daybreak,
 Downward to the regions of the lost....
 But the rushing waters ceased, and the bitter wind fell:
 How I cannot tell, unless that I had come
 To the hollow heart of the storm where the wind is dumb;
 And there my gelid blood thawed, glowed, and grew warm,
 While a black-hooded form caught at my arm, and stayed
 And held me as I swayed, until, at last, I saw
 In a strange unworldly awe, at the gate of light I stood:
 And I entered, alone....

'Behold a cavern of stone carven, and in the midst
 A brazier that hissed with tongued flames, leaping
 Over whitened embers of gummy frankincense,
 Into a fume of dense and fragrant vapour, creeping
 Over the roof to spread a milky coverlet
 Softer than the woof of webby spider's net.
 But never spider yet spun a more delicate wonder
 Than that which hung thereunder, drooping fold on fold,
 Silks that glowed with fire of tawny Oxus gold,
 Richer than ever flowed from the eager fancy of man

In his vain desire for beauty that endures:
 And on the floor were spread by many a heaped daiwan
 Carpets of Kurdistan, cured skins, and water-ewers
 Encrusted with such gems as emperors of Hind
 (Swart conquerors, long dead) sought for their diadems.

No other light was there but one torch, flaring
 Against a square of sky possess'd by the wind,
 And never another sound but the tongued flames creeping.
 'At last, my eyes staring into the clouded gloom,
 Saw that the caverned room with shadowy forms was strewn
 In heavy sleep or swoon fallen, who did not move
 But lay as mortals lie in the sweet release of love.
 And stark between them stood huge eunuchs of ebony,
 Mute, motionless, as they had been carven of black wood.
 But these I scarcely saw, for, through the flame was seen
 Another, a queen, with heavy closèd eyes
 White against the skies of that empurpled night
 In her loveliness she lay, and leaned upon her hand:
 And my blood leapt at the sight, so that I could not stand
 But fell upon my knees, pleading, and cried aloud
 For her white loveliness as Ixion for his cloud:
 And my cry the silence broke, and the sleepers awoke
 From their slumber, stirred, and rose every one, –save those
 Mute eunuchs of ebony, those frowning caryatides.
 Slowly she looked at me, and when I cried again
 In yearning and in pain, she beckoned with her hand.
 Then from my knees rose I, and greatly daring,
 Through the hazy air, past the brazier flaring
 And the hissing flame, crept, until I came
 Unto the carven seat, and kissed her white feet;
 And she smiled, but spake not.
 When she smiled the sleepers wavered as the grass
 Of a cornfield wavers when the ears are swept
 By the breath of brown reapers singing as they pass,
 Or grass of woody glades when a wind that has slept
 Wakens, and invades their moonlit solitude,
 When the hazels shiver and the birch is blown
 To a billow of silver, but oaks in the wood
 Stand firm nor quiver, stand firm as stone:

So, amid the sleepers, the black eunuchs stood.
When the sleepers stirred faintly in the heat
Of that painted room a silken sound I heard,
And a thin music, sweet as the brown nightingale
Sings in the jealous shade of a lonely spinney,
Stranger far than any music mortal made
Fell softer than the dew falleth when stars are pale.
Sweet it was, and clear as light, or as the tears
That sad Narcissus wears in the spring of the year
On barren mountain ranges where rain falls cool
And every lonely pool is sprayed with broken light:
So cool, so beautiful, and so divinely strange
I doubted if it came from any marshy reed
Or hollow fluting stem pluck'd by the hands of men,
Unless it were indeed that airy fugitive
Syrinx, who cried and ran before the laughing eyes
Of goat-footed Pan, and must for ever live
A shadowy green reed by an Arcadian river—
But never music made of Ladon's reedy daughter
Or singing river-water more sweet than that which stole,
Slow as amber honey wells from the honeycomb,
Into my weary soul with solace and strange peace.
So, trembling as I lay in a dream more desolate
Than is the darkened day of the mid-winter north,
I heard the voice of one who sang in a strange tongue,
And I know not what he sang save that he sang of love,
The while they led me forth unheeding, till we came
Unto a chamber lit with one slow-burning flame
That yellow horn bedims, and laid me down, and there
They soothed my bruised limbs, and combed my tangled hair,
And salved my limbs with rarely-mingled unguents pressed
By hands of holy ones who dream beneath the suns
Of Araby the Blest, and so, when they had bathed
My burning eyes with milk of dreamy anodyne
And cool'd my throat with wine,
In robings of cool silk my broken body they swathed,
Sandals of gold they placed upon my feet, and round
My sad sun-blistered brows a silver fillet bound—
Decking me with the pride of a bridegroom that goes
To the joy of his bride and is lovely in her eyes—

And led me to her side. Then, as a conquering prince,
 I, who long since had been battered and tost
 Like a dead leaf or ghost buffeted by wild storms,
 Came to her white arms, conquering, and was lost,
 Yet dared not gaze upon the beauty that I dreamed.
 So, in my trance, it seemed that a shadowy soft dance
 Coiled slowly and unwound, swayed, beckoned, and recovered
 As hooded cobra bound by hollow spells of sound
 Unto the piper sways; so silently they hovered
 I only heard the beat of their naked feet,
 And then, another sound....
 A dull throb thrumming, a noise of faint drumming,
 Threatening, coming nearer, piercing deeper
 Than a dream lost in the heart of a sleeper
 Into those deeps where the dark fire gloweth,
 The secret flame that every man knoweth,
 Embers that smoulder, fires that none can fan,
 Terrible, older than the mind of man....
 Before he crawled from his swamp and spurned
 The life of the beast that dark fire burned
 In the hidden deeps where no dream can come:
 Only the throbbing of a drum
 Can wake it from its smouldering—
 Sightless, soundless, senseless, dumb—
 Dumb as those blind seeds that lie
 Drown'd in mud, and shuddering,
 I knew that I was man no more,
 But a throbbing core of flesh, that knew
 Nor beauty, nor truth, nor anything
 But the black sky and the slimy earth:
 Roots of trees, and fear, and pain,
 The blank of death, the pangs of birth,
 An inhuman thing possess'd
 By the throbbing of a drum:
 And my lips were strange and numb,
 But they kissed her white breast....
 Then, being drunk with pride and splendour of love, I cried:
 "O spring of all delight, O moonèd mystery,
 O living marvel, white as the dead queen of night,
 O flower, and O flame ... tell me at least thy name

That, from this desolate height, I may proclaim its wonder
 To the lost lands hereunder before thy beauty dies
 As fades the fire of dawn upon a peak of snow!"

Then: "Look," she sighed, "into my eyes, and thou shalt know."
 So, with her fingers frail, she pressed my brows, and so,
 Slowly, at last, she raised my drooping eyelids pale,
 And in her eyes I gazed.

'Then fear, than love more blind,
 Caught at my heart and fast in chains of horror bound—
 As one who in profound and midnight forest ways
 Sees in the dark the burning eyes of a tiger barred
 Or stealthy footed pard blaze in a solemn hate
 And lust of human blood, yet cannot cry, nor turning
 Flee from the huddled wood, but stands and sees his fate,
 Or one who in a black night, groping for his track,
 Clings to the dizzy verge of a cragged precipice,
 Shrinks from the dim abyss, yet dare not venture back,
 And no sound hears but the hiss of empty air
 Swirling past his ears.... So, in a hideous
 Abandonment of hope, I waited for her kiss.
 Then the restless beat of the muttering drum
 Rose to a frenzied heat; the naked dancers leapt
 Insolent through the flame, laughing as they came
 With parted lips; their cries deadened my ears, my eyes
 Throbbled with the pattering of their rapid feet,
 And the whirling dust of their dancing swept
 Into my throat unslaked, dry-parchèd with love's drought,
 Until my mouth was pressed upon her burning mouth
 In a kiss most terrible.... Oh, was it pride, or shame
 Unending, without name, or ecstasy, or pain
 Or desperate desire? Alas! I cannot tell,
 Save that it pierced my trembling soul and body with fire.
 For, while her soft lips clove to mine in love, she drove
 A flaming blade of steel into my breast, and I,
 Rent with a bitter cry, slid from her side and fell
 Clutching in dumb despair the dark unbraided hair
 My passion had despoiled; while she, like serpent coiled,
 Poised for another stroke, terribly, slowly, smiled,
 Saying: "O stranger, red, red are my lips, and sweet
 Unto those lips so red are the kisses of the dead:

Far hast thou wandered, far, for the kisses of Thamar:"
 Then a deep silence fell on the frenzy and the laughter;
 The leaping dancers crept to the shadows where they had slept,
 And the mute eunuchs stood forth, and hugely bent
 Above my body, spent in its pool of blood,
 And hove me with black arms, while the queen followed after
 With stealthy steps, and eyes that burned into the night
 Of my dying brain, till, with her hand, she bade
 Them falter, and they stayed, while, eagerly, she propped
 My listless head that dropped downward from my shoulders,
 And slowly raised it up, raised it like a cup
 Unto her lips again,
 Then shuddered, trembled, shrunk, as though her mouth had drunk
 A potion where the fell fire of poison smoulders.
 And a darkness came, and I could see no more,
 But in my ears the roar of lonely torrents swelled
 And stilled my breath for ever, as though a wave appalling
 Had broken in my brain, and deep to deep were calling:
 And I felt my body falling down and down and down
 Into a blank of death, where dumb waters roll
 Endlessly, only knowing, that her dagger had stabbed my breast,
 But her kiss had killed my soul.
 And now I know no rest until again I stand
 Where that lost city's towers rise from the dreamy sand,
 Until I reach the gate where the lips of Asia wait,
 Till I cross the desert's drought, and the rivers of the south,
 And shiver through the night under those summits white
 That soar above Cathay; until I see the light
 Flame from those tyrannous glooms where, like a tired star
 In stormy darkness, looms the castle of Thamar.'

ENVOI

Now that the hour has come, and under the lonely
 Darkness I stumble at the doors of death,

It is not hope, nor faith
That here my spirit sustaineth, but love only.

In visions, in love: only there have I clutched at divinity:
But the vision fadeth; yet love fades not: and for this
I would have you know that your kiss
Was more to me than all my hopes of infinity.

Therein you made me divine ... you, who were moon and sun for
me,
You, for whose beauty I would have forsaken the splendour of
the stars
And my shadowy avatars
Renounced: for there is nothing in the world you have not done for
me.

So that when at length all sentient skill hath forsaken me,
And the bright world beats vainly on my consciousness,
Your beauty shineth no less:
And even if I were dead I think your shadow would awaken me.

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